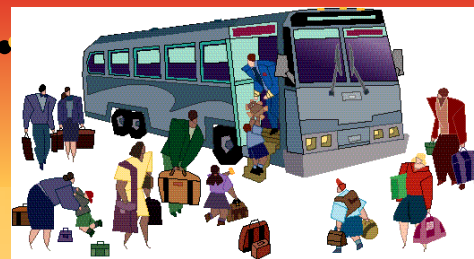


# KNOW THE RULES..

## WHEN YOUR CHILD IS TRAVELING UNACCOMPANIED BY BUS OR TRAIN

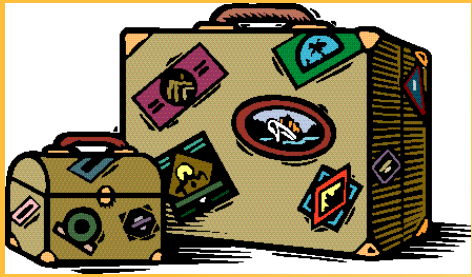


**T**he purpose of this publication is to guide parents and their children in a way that will help prevent negative experiences and ensure the child's safe journey from start to finish. Appropriate planning with train or bus lines and your child is the best way to guard against any unpleasant travel experiences. To assist you in this process, it helps to know that there are some consistencies among transportation providers. For instance, Greyhound and Amtrak, the nation's primary bus company and passenger railroad respectively, do not allow children who are younger than the age of 8 to travel unaccompanied. While children who are older than 12 are considered an adult and may travel unaccompanied as any adult would without restrictions, children between the ages of 8 and 11 may travel unaccompanied under the conditions noted below.

- \* There can be no transfers allowed between trains or from a train to a bus, and children cannot change buses.
- \* The railroad stations at which a child begins and ends a trip must be staffed at the time of departure and arrival. The bus departure and arrival terminals must be open at both the child's departure and arrival, and an adult designated by the child's parent or guardian must meet the child at the arrival terminal.
- \* Train and bus trips must be scheduled during daylight hours, and bus trips may not last more than 5 hours.
- \* Written permission must be obtained before the child is permitted to travel alone. A responsible adult must bring the child to the bus or train station at least one hour prior to departure to complete an "Unaccompanied Child Travel Form" and obtain permission from station personnel that the child is capable of traveling alone. The name, address, and telephone number of the responsible adult meeting the child at the destination must be given.
- \* In most cases, everyone 12 and older must pay full-fare when traveling by train or bus.

The general rules noted below will help make the travel experience for your child safer and more enjoyable.

1. When you make reservations or buy a ticket for your child, specify that the child will be traveling alone. Make certain that you are clear about the specific requirements for children traveling alone, ask for a written copy of the policies and procedures, and review them with your child.
2. When booking train travel, inquire about meal accommodations. Since dining and café cars may not be available or the food offered in them may not appeal to your child, be sure to pack a healthy, "non-messy" snack for the trip.<sup>1</sup> Because buses do not supply meal or beverage service onboard and meal stops are limited in both time and variety, be sure your child has convenient beverages and snacks for the trip. Also be sure to notify bus and train personnel of any life-threatening food allergies your child has.
3. Get to the station or terminal early as, in most cases, you will not be able to reserve specific seats on either the bus or train. Try to secure a seat near the dining or café car on the train or front of the bus so that your child will be closer to transit personnel.<sup>2</sup>



4. As with any new experience, “practice makes perfect.” Thus, try to visit the bus or train station prior to your child’s trip. Take a tour of the area, introduce your child to some of the people working for the train or bus line, and explain the basics of the travel experience. Let your child know the types of things to expect. Instruct your child to follow general safety rules like moving cautiously up and down the aisles while onboard for his or her comfort and safety. Advise your child that the bus or train personnel are the “helping adults” to seek out when needing assistance, needing answers to questions, feeling uncomfortable, or becoming confused by anything or anyone.

5. On the day of travel, at a minimum, follow the suggested time of arrival prior to the departure of the bus or train. And, with the nature of travel with a child, you may want to arrive even earlier. Be sure to allow enough time to fill out the mandatory paperwork and ensure that your child is settled. You must remain at the station until the bus or train leaves. Should a delay occur, your child will be much more comfortable in the waiting area with you than sitting aboard the bus or train. And if the trip is canceled or redirected, you will want to be there to make alternative arrangements.
6. Check with the bus or train line to see what documentation parents must provide prior to the child being allowed to travel alone. Be prepared to show identification when you bring your child to the station and advise the adult(s) picking up your child that they may have to show identification when they pick up your child. Make certain you have a back-up plan for the person(s) meeting the bus or train at the destination, in case they are delayed. Make certain that your child knows the person he or she is traveling to meet, so that an unfamiliar person does not meet him or her, and advise your child never to leave the boarding area with anyone you have not authorized to pick him or her up.
7. Dress your child comfortably in layered clothing, so he or she may adjust to various temperatures. A change of clothing is a good idea as well. Your child must have sufficient money for meals and incidental expenses. When you give your child spending money, be sure to include coins.
8. Your child should travel lightly with a carry-on piece of luggage or backpack that holds clothes and essentials such as identification, medications, reading materials, and games. Your child’s photo identification and medications should be put in an envelope for safekeeping inside the carry-on luggage or backpack. Since red caps and baggage handlers aren’t always available, your child should bring only what he or she can manage.<sup>3</sup> It’s a good idea to pack wipes for your child, since onboard restroom facilities may not be adequate.
9. Children may use hand-held video games, radios, tape players, CD players, and portable televisions if they use headphones and the equipment is not noisy or intrusive to other passengers. Consider equipping your child with a cellular telephone so that delays or problems may be communicated to you. Cellular telephone use is allowed on both trains and buses.
10. Tell your child not to become too friendly with other passengers, because these are people the child doesn’t know. As in any social situation, it’s okay for your child to be polite but restrained. Caution your child not to reveal any personal information about him- or herself to other passengers.

**1-800-THE-LOST (1-800-843-5678)**

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<sup>1</sup>Lansky, Vicky. *Trouble-Free Travel with Children: Helpful Hints for Parents on the Go*. New York, New York: MJF Books, 1996, page 112

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., page 114.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., page 113.

